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Report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict

Introduction

1. The present report, covering the year 2016, is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the statement by the President of the Security Council of 25 November 2015 (S/PRST/2015/23). It is the thirteenth report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Herein, I review the global state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, discuss recent progress and provide recommendations aimed at strengthening such protection. The report also responds to the Council's request in its resolution 2286 (2016) for enhanced reporting on the protection of medical care in armed conflict.

2. Armed conflicts are tearing apart vast swathes of the world and record numbers of people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection.[1] Some 97 per cent of humanitarian assistance goes to complex emergencies, the majority of which involve armed conflicts.[2] Globally, more than 65 million people have been displaced by conflict, violence or persecution. More than 20 million people, including 1.4 million children, are on the brink of famine in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. At the same time, among the international community there is a growing sense of fatigue, even resignation, in addressing the suffering of civilians in conflict.

3. All State and non-State parties to conflict must respect international humanitarian law, and all States must ensure such respect. Yet, in many conflicts, parties flout their obligations and show contempt for human life and dignity, often with impunity. Civilians are routinely killed in direct and indiscriminate attacks. As conflict becomes increasingly urbanized, the impact on civilians reaches new lows, with bombs and rockets destroying schools, hospitals, markets and places of worship, while children are pulled from the rubble of their homes. Sexual violence shatters lives and undermines community cohesion. These horrors are exacerbated when civilians are deprived of basic relief items and services, sometimes even besieged for months at a time. Faced with such brutality, millions of civilians are forced to flee their homes in search of safety. The result is a global protection crisis.

[1] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Global humanitarian overview 2017: a consolidated appeal to support people affected by disaster and conflict".

[2] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *World Humanitarian Data and Trends 2016* (New York, 2016).

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4. In the present report I set out a path to protection — my vision for collective action to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict. My overarching priority is to galvanize the international community to prevent and resolve conflicts and build sustainable peace. In the long term, the best way to protect civilians is to tackle the root causes of conflicts, promote human rights and the rule of law, strengthen governance and institutions and invest in inclusive and sustainable development. There must be a shift from perpetual reaction to early action, including the ability to identify and act upon signs of impending or potential conflict and threats to civilians. A commitment to conflict prevention also compels us to address illicit and irresponsible arms transfers, which enable conflict and undermine protection and peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, although beyond the scope of the present report, my vision of prevention encompasses not only violent armed conflict, but also the increasingly complex array of crises that take a significant toll on humanity and produce unsustainable levels of human suffering.

5. Where prevention fails, we must make every effort to protect the lives and dignity of civilians caught up in conflict. In this regard, three protection priorities clearly emerge across conflicts. First, we must enhance respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law and promote good practice by parties to conflict. Second, we must protect the humanitarian and medical mission and accord priority to the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations. Third, we must prevent forced displacement and pursue durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons. These protection priorities are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. In particular, strengthening respect for international law is a prerequisite to achieving priorities two and three.

6. Achieving these goals necessitates a multi-faceted approach encompassing a diversity of actors. An intensified global effort is needed at the international, regional and national levels to raise public understanding of the human cost of conflict and enhance respect for international law and the protection of civilians. The Security Council and Member States must be at the forefront of this effort. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States committed themselves to leaving no one behind and to reaching those furthest behind first. The World Humanitarian Summit, held in 2016, reinforced this vision. Member States must now take specific action to implement their commitments and ensure that civilians in conflict, who are among the most vulnerable, are protected. I am personally committed to ensuring that this becomes a priority in all aspects of United Nations work.

Protection priority 1
Enhance respect for international law and promote good practice by parties to conflict

Reports of widespread violations indicate a lack of respect for international law across conflicts

7. In many conflicts, government forces and non-State armed groups continued to defy international law by directly targeting civilians and civilian objects, launching indiscriminate attacks or failing to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm. Civilians were killed, tortured, raped, enslaved, abducted, disappeared, used as human shields, forcibly recruited or forcibly displaced, among other violations. In some conflicts, deliberately attacking hospitals, schools and places of worship, removing humanitarian goods from convoys and besieging entire communities were strategic methods of warfare.

8. These trends were epitomized in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, most visibly in Aleppo in late 2016. Direct attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and schools, in addition to the indiscriminate use of artillery, mortars, rockets and air-delivered bombs, were widely reported in both conflicts. In the Syrian Arab Republic, besiegement of communities remained a deliberate tactic, triggering allegations that starvation was used as a method of war. Water supplies were cut off in Aleppo and Damascus, in some cases deliberately, affecting millions of people (see A/HRC/34/CRP.3, paras. 32-37, and A/HRC/34/64, para. 47), while Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and affiliated groups continued to carry out suicide bombings, sexual enslavement of women and girls, summary executions, physical mutilation and other atrocities. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons investigated more than 60 credible allegations of chemical weapon use in the Syrian Arab Republic. In Yemen, the United Nations found credible allegations of the use of cluster bombs by coalition forces and of landmines by pro-Houthi armed groups and pro-Saleh army units (see A/HRC/33/38, paras. 33-36).

9. Hostilities escalated significantly in Afghanistan, where the United Nations recorded 11,418 conflict-related civilian casualties (3,498 killed and 7,920 injured), the highest number since the systematic documentation of civilian casualties began in 2009. Particularly concerning was the 24 per cent increase in the number of child casualties (923 killed and 2,589 injured) compared with 2015. Non-State armed groups continued to target civilians using suicide tactics and improvised explosive devices, while the number of civilian casualties from air strikes doubled compared with 2015. The civilian toll also remained high in Iraq (6,878 killed and 12,388 injured). There were widespread reports of serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated against Iraqi civilians, in particular by ISIL. These included attacks targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure, the use of human shields, summary executions, sexual violence, forced marriage, abductions and forcible recruitment of children.

10. Similar patterns were documented in other conflicts, to varying degrees. In north-eastern Nigeria and neighbouring Lake Chad basin countries, violations and abuses were reportedly committed by Boko Haram and in the context of government counter-insurgency operations. In one of the worst forms of forcible recruitment and use, Boko Haram used 30 girls and boys for suicide attacks in the Lake Chad basin. In South Sudan, the protection of civilians continued to deteriorate, in particular from July. Reported incidents included extrajudicial killings, abductions, sexual violence and restrictions on freedom of movement by both parties to conflict. In November, my Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide warned of the risk of genocide in South Sudan. Genocide does not happen overnight; it is a process that takes time to prepare. Therefore, it can be prevented. We have a shared responsibility to do everything in our power to avert the risk and I call upon the Security Council to take decisive action.

11. In the occupied Palestinian territory, the violence that escalated in late 2015 continued at a reduced level. In December, the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), in which it condemned a range of measures in the occupied Palestinian territory that violated international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions, calling for an end to all settlement activities, acts of violence and incitement.

12. Endemic sexual violence continued with impunity in many conflicts, as detailed in my annual report on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2017/249). There were widespread reports of rapes by parties to conflict, mostly in conjunction with other crimes such as killing, looting, abduction, forced displacement, arbitrary detention and trafficking in persons. In many cases, the strategic nature of the violence was evident in the selective targeting of victims from opposing ethnic, religious or political groups. Patterns of sexual violence were also seen in the

context of urban warfare, during house searches and operations in residential areas and at checkpoints. I call upon the Security Council, Member States and other relevant actors to implement the recommendations in that report, including by supporting the socioeconomic reintegration of survivors, who often suffer lifelong stigma and exclusion.

13. Children continued to pay a heavy price in conflict. In several conflicts, including in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, grave violations against children, in particular killing and maiming, continued at high levels, as recorded through the monitoring and reporting mechanism on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict. The recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups also remained a serious concern, with significant increases in the Central African Republic, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic.

14. I am particularly concerned about the detrimental impact of conflict on education. The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that 246 million children live in conflict zones and many are deprived of education when their schools are destroyed, used for military purposes or closed for security reasons or because teachers have fled. In Afghanistan, nearly half of primary-school-age children are out of school. In South Sudan, almost 60 per cent of primary-school-age children are out of school and 1 in 3 schools in conflict-affected areas has been closed. The military use of 41 schools in Afghanistan was verified through the monitoring and reporting mechanism, and there were 21 new cases of such use in South Sudan. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there were 51 verified attacks on schools, more than double the number in 2015. Girls' education continued to suffer, with threats or attacks against female teachers and pupils in Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, Nigeria and the Syrian Arab Republic. I urge all Member States to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, an international commitment to protect schools and universities from being attacked or used for military purposes in conflict.

15. I am also concerned about the plight of missing persons and their families. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the number of persons reported missing in conflicts has dramatically increased since 2014 and in some contexts has more than quadrupled. I call upon parties to conflict to uphold families' right to know the fate of their missing relatives, as provided by international humanitarian law, and I encourage parties to collaborate with ICRC and its Central Tracing Agency as a neutral, independent and impartial intermediary.

Greater efforts are needed to avoid civilian harm during urban hostilities

16. Armed conflicts are increasingly being fought in urban areas,[3] affecting an estimated 50 million people in cities worldwide.[4] Several major cities, including Aleppo, Fallujah, Juba, Maiduguri, Mosul, Sirte and Ta'izz, witnessed intense urban battles. Owing to high population density and the close proximity of civilians and civilian objects to military objectives, urban warfare entails a greater risk of civilian death, injury and displacement, in addition to damage to civilian property and essential infrastructure. Moreover, urban systems such as water and power supplies are often interconnected, meaning that damage to infrastructure can have a dire impact on large numbers of people.

17. Urban warfare is particularly devastating for civilians when it involves the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects. Many parties to conflict routinely use

[3] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *States of Fragility 2016: Understanding Violence* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2016).

[4] ICRC, "Urban services during protracted armed conflict: a call for a better approach to assisting affected people" (Geneva, 2015).

heavy artillery, aerial bombardment and improvised explosive devices in urban centres. According to Action on Armed Violence, 45,624 deaths and injuries from explosive weapons were reported; 70 per cent (32,088) were civilians. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, civilians accounted for 92 per cent of reported deaths and injuries. Action on Armed Violence recorded the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries from explosive weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, followed by Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan.

18. The use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas also has dire long-term consequences for civilians, including the destruction of housing, schools, hospitals, electricity grids and water and sanitation systems, the displacement of civilians and the loss of education and livelihood opportunities. In the Syrian Arab Republic, air strikes around Damascus in December damaged an aquifer and other key water infrastructure, depriving more than 5 million people of regular access to potable water for over a month (see A/HRC/34/CRP.3, para. 37). Globally, this pattern is largely predictable, and its immense scale is undermining efforts to protect civilians, build lasting peace and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. The use of explosive weapons also leaves explosive remnants of war, which pose a continuing lethal threat to civilians, especially children, and a major obstacle to reconstruction and the return of displaced persons. The United Nations recorded a sharp rise in global civilian casualties from landmines and other explosive remnants of war, with contamination affecting more than 80 countries and territories. In Afghanistan, 2016 saw the highest-ever recorded number of civilian casualties from explosive remnants of war (217 killed and 507 injured), an increase of 66 per cent compared with 2015; 84 per cent of those casualties were children. In Iraq, many internally displaced persons reported that their homes had been contaminated with explosive remnants of war, preventing their return. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Mine Action Service estimates that 6.3 million people live in contaminated areas. The importance of clearance operations and risk education cannot be overstated. Such operations not only prevent casualties, but also enable civilians to return home and rebuild their livelihoods and reduce the potential for explosive remnants of war to be repurposed into improvised explosive devices.

20. Minimizing the impact of urban combat on civilians is a vitally important task for both attacking and defending forces. This includes taking constant care to spare civilians and civilian objects, avoiding locating military objectives in or near densely populated areas and removing civilians and civilian objects from the vicinity of military objectives. Crucially, I call upon all State and non-State parties to conflict to avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas. Parties should also develop and implement operational policies and practical measures on the use of these weapons to avoid civilian harm. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has compiled examples of existing policy and practice to assist parties in this regard. The Austrian-led process to develop a political declaration on the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas provides an important avenue for discussion and action. I encourage Member States to engage constructively in this process.

All States must use their influence to enhance respect for international law

21. A survey by ICRC of 17,000 people, entitled "People on war: perspectives from 16 countries", conducted in 2016, showed that civilians in conflict-affected countries clearly recognized the value of applying international humanitarian law; they were acutely aware that war must have limits. It also revealed an alarming trend among the populations of countries not directly affected by hostilities: compared with 1999, there is a growing degree of acceptance that civilian death is

an inevitable part of war. We must counter this narrative and reverse this trend. Civilian death and suffering would be greatly reduced if existing rules of international law were implemented effectively.

22. All parties to conflict must comply with their obligations to respect and protect civilians, but the onus to ensure respect for international humanitarian law does not rest on them alone. All States are obliged to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Their words and actions should encourage other States and non-State parties to conflict to uphold respect for civilians' lives and dignity. Conversely, States must not facilitate violations by financing, arming or training parties who are at risk of flouting the law. In this regard, military partnerships provide a unique opportunity to influence parties to conflict and ensure respect for international law.

Irresponsible arms transfers exacerbate conflict and undermine the protection of civilians

23. The Security Council has repeatedly recognized that the widespread availability and poorly regulated transfer of arms and ammunition are key enablers of conflict and civilian harm.[5] In this regard, I reiterate the recommendations made in 2016 (see A/71/438-A/CONF.192/BMS/2016/1). The effective implementation of instruments such as the Arms Trade Treaty and the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects can greatly contribute to protecting civilians. I urge all States to refrain from exporting conventional arms and ammunition where they are likely to be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international humanitarian law or international human rights law. Rigorous due diligence measures should underpin this restraint, including the undertaking of risk assessments before authorizing arms exports and periodic review thereafter. I strongly encourage all States to ratify or accede to the Arms Trade Treaty and similar regional instruments without delay.

Positive examples of dialogue, policy and practice to enhance the protection of civilians in conflict

24. There were several important initiatives at the international, regional and national levels in 2016. In May, the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit was held in Istanbul, Turkey, with more than 9,000 participants from Member States, non-governmental organizations, civil society, international organizations, the private sector and crisis-affected populations. Stakeholders made more than 3,000 commitments to advancing the various elements of the Agenda for Humanity, including upholding international law and strengthening the protection of civilians. I urge all stakeholders to translate their commitments into specific action and provide updates on their progress annually through the Platform for Action, Commitments and Transformations.

25. The intergovernmental process on strengthening respect for international humanitarian law, mandated at the Thirty-second International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in Geneva in December 2015, continued to make progress. Several meetings were held in 2016, with more planned for 2017. I encourage all Member States to engage constructively in this process.

26. At the regional level, the African Union remained a key partner in protecting civilians. The African Union Mission in Somalia, supported by the United Nations, made important progress in implementing its Civilian Casualty Tracking, Analysis and Response Cell and began to develop standard operating procedures to make

[5] See resolutions 2274 (2016), 2283 (2016), 2296 (2016) and 2313 (2016).

amends for civilian harm resulting from its operations. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization adopted a policy for the protection of civilians, which is aimed at instilling a coherent approach to the protection of civilians in all its operations, missions and activities, including in planning and conducting operations, training, lesson learning and capacity-building.

27. At the national level, the Government of Afghanistan, supported by the United Nations, developed a draft national policy on civilian casualty mitigation and established working groups to support the implementation of policies and practices to protect civilians in conflict. In Nigeria, the Defence Headquarters committed itself to developing a national policy on civilian protection and harm mitigation, following a multi-stakeholder dialogue in November. The Government of the United States of America issued an executive order setting out policies and practices to mitigate civilian casualties in military operations, including pre-strike measures such as enhanced training and capabilities and post-strike measures such as investigations, public reporting and ex gratia payments.

28. In Colombia, the landmark peace agreement between the Government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo was a welcome development with the potential to transform the lives of those affected by the conflict. In the Central African Republic, the Government ratified or acceded to seven core international human rights instruments. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Government continued to implement its action plan to end and prevent sexual violence and the recruitment and use of children by the military, including through the prosecution of several commanders. In the Sudan, the Government signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict.

29. If implemented effectively, the measures described above could play a significant role in strengthening the protection of civilians. I urge Member States and regional and other intergovernmental organizations to develop and implement holistic policies or strategies on the protection of civilians and civilian harm mitigation, including training, doctrine and the development of capacities to track and analyse civilian harm in military operations. This would help to institutionalize the protection of civilians in regional, national and local contexts.

30. Important progress was made in addressing the conduct of non-State armed groups, which are key actors in today's conflicts. Two additional groups signed the Geneva Call deed of commitment for the protection of children from the effects of armed conflict, and one signed its deed of commitment for the prohibition of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and towards the elimination of gender discrimination. In the Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North signed an action plan with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children in conflict. In Colombia, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — Ejército del Pueblo increased the age limit for recruitment from 17 to 18 years and began to demobilize children. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Syrian Democratic Forces prohibited the recruitment of persons under 18 years of age. I encourage non-State armed groups to adopt practical measures aimed at protecting civilians, working with the United Nations and relevant non-governmental organization as appropriate.

Systematic data collection, analysis and reporting enhance protection and accountability

31. Systematic data collection, analysis and reporting facilitate evidence-based analysis of trends and patterns of civilian harm, inform dialogue with parties to conflict, deter violations and promote accountability. Human rights monitoring and

reporting, casualty tracking and gender analysis are critical. In Somalia, for example, United Nations human rights risk assessments for Somali security forces and African Union Mission in Somalia operations informed measures to mitigate civilian casualties and prevent violations. I encourage the development and improvement of mechanisms to systematically collect information relating to the protection of civilians, including data disaggregated by sex and age, and to ensure that it feeds into conflict analysis, prevention and response.

32. Journalists play an important role in conflict situations. Independent and accurate reporting is essential to expose human suffering, restrain military actors and put pressure on political actors to find solutions to conflicts and promote accountability. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization condemned the killing of 102 journalists. The majority were killed in conflict situations; countless others were injured. I urge Member States to inform the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization of the status of judicial enquiries into these killings, strengthen protection for journalists reporting in conflict situations and prevent impunity. The United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity remains an essential guiding framework in this regard.

Accountability is crucial to enhance respect for international law and provide justice for victims

33. Fundamental to enhancing respect for international law is the need to ensure accountability for violations, for both parties to conflict and individual perpetrators. There were several positive developments in national-level investigations and prosecutions, although some initiatives made limited progress. For example, the Central African Republic took steps to make the Special Criminal Court operational, including by making progress towards the recruitment of the prosecutor and judicial staff. In Mali, a joint United Nations-government mechanism was established to review progress in investigations and prosecutions in key cases; however, the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2015, made limited progress. In the Sudan, the number of cases, in particular cases of sexual violence against children, handled by the Office of the Special Prosecutor for the crimes committed in Darfur continued to increase. I urge the Security Council to encourage effective remedies at the national level for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

34. International investigative and judicial mechanisms can also help to ensure accountability. For example, the General Assembly adopted resolution 71/248, by which it established an international, impartial and independent mechanism to assist in the investigation and prosecution of persons responsible for the most serious crimes under international law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011.

35. The International Criminal Court made important progress, including by completing the trials of Jean-Pierre Bemba (convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the Central African Republic) and Ahmad al-Faqi al-Mahdi (convicted of crimes relating to the destruction of religious buildings and historic monuments in Timbuktu, Mali). It also began the trial of an alleged Lord's Resistance Army commander, Dominic Ongwen, and authorized a new investigation in Georgia. As the Court's caseload continues to increase, protecting this indispensable institution and its work must be a priority. It was therefore deeply concerning that some States parties to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court took steps towards withdrawing from the Statute. I welcome the revocations of withdrawal by the Governments of the Gambia and South Africa and urge those and other States parties to reaffirm their commitment to the Court. I call

upon all States to strengthen dialogue, ratify the Statute and cooperate with the Court to ensure that this essential system of justice is as far-reaching as possible.

36. The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia made further progress towards the completion of its work, notably by completing the trial of Radovan Karadžić (convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes). The sustained political support that the Security Council and Member States have provided to the Tribunal has been essential to the fulfilment of its mandate. Similar levels of support should be provided to the International Criminal Court to enable it to fulfil its mandate. I also call upon the Council to refer situations to the Court in appropriate cases.

Protection priority II
Protect the humanitarian and medical mission and accord priority to the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations

A collective effort is needed to protect medical care in armed conflict: resolution 2286 (2016)

37. More than 150 years ago, States agreed on a binding set of rules to protect wounded and sick combatants and those who care for them in conflict. Today it is a sacrosanct obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and treat all wounded and sick — civilians and combatants alike — and to respect and protect them and the medical personnel and facilities that fulfil this mission. In recent conflicts, however, many hospitals have been treated as part of the battlefield rather than as sanctuaries for the wounded and sick. The World Health Organization (WHO) recorded attacks against medical care in 20 conflict-affected countries resulting in 863 medical personnel being killed or injured. Many incidents were never investigated, and where investigations were conducted they often failed to meet international standards, preventing effective corrective action and accountability.

38. The level of violence affecting medical care is particularly alarming in the Syrian Arab Republic, where Physicians for Human Rights documented 108 attacks on medical facilities. Many facilities were damaged beyond repair, depriving people of medical care just when they needed it most. In one particularly brutal series of attacks between July and November, multiple air strikes were launched on a square in the Shi'ar district of Aleppo, where three hospitals, a clinic and the blood bank were located (see A/HRC/34/64, para. 38). Several air strikes hit the only children's hospital in eastern Aleppo, leading to the death of four newborns and undermining children's access to health care.

39. Similar patterns were evident in other conflicts, to varying degrees. In the Central African Republic, the United Nations verified 16 attacks against medical facilities, while 19 were verified in Yemen. In some cases, medical facilities were hit notwithstanding the adoption of specific deconfliction measures. For example, Médecins sans frontières reported that two hospitals that it supported in Yemen were hit by air strikes in the second half of 2016, even though it had shared the GPS coordinates with parties to conflict and clearly marked the building roofs.

40. There were also numerous cases of medical supplies being removed from humanitarian convoys and warehouses. In the Syrian Arab Republic, government security forces removed medical supplies, including trauma kits, surgical supplies, anaesthetics and antibiotics, from more than three quarters of inter-agency convoys.

By the end of the year, the Government had confiscated 75 tons of medicines and medical supplies.[6]

41. In other instances, parties to conflict used medical facilities for military purposes, sometimes for months or even years at a time. This exposed facilities and patients to an increased risk of attack. In Afghanistan, parties successively took over a health clinic in the district of Jani Khel, Paktiya province, between August and October, destroying and looting 60 per cent of its medical equipment. In Iraq, ISIL took over the Salam hospital in eastern Mosul for two years, using it as a base during intense fighting in December and thereby endangering patients and medical staff. ISIL also took over the second floor of the Fallujah general hospital for several months before it was hit by an air strike in May, damaging the emergency room and other facilities.

42. Every medical worker attacked, every hospital bombed, every medical convoy looted deprives the wounded and sick of vital care. This jeopardizes life and exacerbates suffering. For example, WHO estimates that 30,000 people are injured each month in the Syrian conflict, and without timely treatment many will suffer lifelong disabilities. Attacks on medical care also have catastrophic longer-term consequences as facilities close and workers flee, depriving entire communities of access to medical services. WHO estimates that only 43 per cent of the South Sudanese health facilities remain functional, providing minimal services. In Yemen, medical supplies are in chronically short supply, and only 45 per cent of medical facilities are functioning. In the Syrian Arab Republic, more than half of all medical facilities are closed or only partially functioning, and two thirds of specialized medical personnel have fled the country. An estimated 360,000 women in the Syrian Arab Republic are pregnant and require reproductive and maternal health services, which in many cases are not readily available.[7]

43. Less-visible impediments to the provision of medical care have also emerged. In some contexts, States have developed policies or practices that prevent, impede or punish the impartial provision of medical care in line with medical ethics. In Afghanistan, the United Nations reported that medical personnel had been threatened, intimidated, harassed and abducted to prevent the treatment of wounded or sick opposition fighters. In the Syrian Arab Republic, the Government has on many occasions withheld approval for the delivery of medical supplies and equipment in areas controlled by non-State armed groups. Some States have even enacted legislation that may criminalize the provision of medical care to members of some non-State armed groups, such as those designated as "terrorist" by the Security Council or under national law.

44. All parties to conflict have an obligation to respect and protect wounded and sick civilians and fighters alike. The wounded and sick must not be attacked. They must receive the medical care and attention required by their condition to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay, without any distinction except on medical grounds. Parties to conflict must also respect and protect medical personnel, units and transports exclusively assigned and engaged in medical duties and must not punish any person for performing medical duties in line with medical ethics.

45. The Security Council recalled those rules and called for their full implementation in its landmark resolution 2286 (2016) on the protection of medical care in armed conflict. The Council urged parties to conflict and Member States to

[6] WHO Syrian Arab Republic, *Annual Report 2016* (Damascus, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, 2017).

[7] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian response plan: January-December 2017 — Syrian Arab Republic" (March 2017).

take action in several areas, including facilitating the safe and unimpeded passage of medical personnel, assets and supplies; developing effective measures to prevent and address acts of violence, attacks and threats against medical care; integrating protection measures into the planning and conduct of military operations; and conducting effective investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law. In August, upon the Council's request, the Secretary-General submitted recommendations identifying practical measures to implement the resolution (see S/2016/722).

46. Many stakeholders have already taken such steps. Canada and Switzerland have established an informal group of States to support implementation, notably through the exchange of good practice. Several Member States are reviewing their national legal frameworks. The International Committee of Military Medicine, which encompasses the military medical services of 112 States, urged its members to put the protection of medical care on the agenda of their political and military authorities. National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies have continued to advocate a range of specific protection measures. Efforts are also under way, most notably by WHO, to improve the collection of data on impediments to medical care. These are welcome initiatives. I urge all Member States, parties to conflict and relevant organizations to implement practical measures, such as those contained in the recommendations submitted pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016), without delay.

Humanitarian access is essential for civilians to receive life-saving assistance and protection

47. Rapid, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access is critical for an effective response to the needs of millions of people affected by conflicts. Widespread, serious and sometimes persistent humanitarian access constraints jeopardized humanitarian operations. Besides active hostilities, the most severe constraints included attacks against humanitarian personnel or assets and bureaucratic impediments, including movement restrictions.

48. There is a particularly urgent need for greater humanitarian access in Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen, where millions are on the brink of famine. Humanitarian access restrictions imposed by parties to conflict played a key role in this crisis. In Yemen, for example, access denials and restrictions by all parties severely hampered the humanitarian response. There were difficulties in obtaining entry clearances from the de facto authorities for essential humanitarian supplies such as vaccines. Compounding these constraints, several commercial vessels destined for Yemeni ports on the Red Sea were deliberately delayed, blocked or diverted by the coalition led by Saudi Arabia, thereby restricting the import of food, fuel and other basic commodities. This had grave consequences for civilians as food imports reached their lowest level since the conflict began.

49. In South Sudan, all parties to conflict impeded deliveries of life-saving assistance, including through bureaucratic impediments and attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets. For example, access was repeatedly denied to areas outside the town of Wau, Western Bahr el-Ghazal. Critical bureaucratic impediments included the detention and deportation of senior non-governmental organization staff and interference in recruitment processes following the passing of the Non-Governmental Organizations Act in February.

50. Parties to conflict also impeded humanitarian access in the Syrian Arab Republic, with dire consequences for civilians. Government-imposed administrative procedures severely constrained the delivery of assistance across conflict lines. The Government approved only 45 per cent of access requests. Meanwhile, the number of people living in besieged areas doubled, reaching a peak of almost 1 million in

November. On average, the United Nations was able to deliver assistance each month to only some 20 per cent of people in besieged areas and less than 10 per cent of people in hard-to-reach areas, owing to constraints imposed by the parties.

51. In Myanmar, international humanitarian organizations were prohibited from taking relief supplies into non-government-controlled areas and experienced delays in obtaining travel authorizations in government-controlled areas. Severe movement restrictions on Muslim communities continued, impeding access to basic services. In Ukraine, humanitarian access in non-government-controlled areas remained challenging owing to bureaucratic impediments imposed by the Government and the de facto authorities. The ban on all commercial trade with non-government-controlled areas, including the delivery of medical supplies, remained a significant driver of humanitarian needs.

52. Against this backdrop, I remind all parties to conflict that they have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic needs of civilians under their effective control. If these basic needs are not being met, States must not arbitrarily withhold consent to impartial relief operations in a manner contrary to international law. Once consent is granted, all parties to conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access, subject to any necessary technical and practical arrangements. Using starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare is strictly prohibited. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recently commissioned and published the *Oxford Guidance on the Law Relating to Humanitarian Relief Operations in Situations of Armed Conflict*, which was prepared by researchers at the University of Oxford and is aimed at facilitating policy development and advocacy to support effective humanitarian action.

53. The politicization of humanitarian action also affected the ability of humanitarian actors to reach affected populations in a safe, predictable and principled manner. Humanitarian action must remain distinct from political or military objectives and be conducted in line with the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. I urge all Member States and parties to conflict to respect these principles. In a forthcoming study, entitled "Presence and proximity: to stay and deliver, five years on", emphasis is laid on the importance of humanitarian organizations gaining the acceptance of parties to conflict in order to operate. Member States must not impede humanitarian actors' efforts to interact with all relevant parties, including non-State armed groups, and to operate in areas under their control.

Humanitarian workers and assets must be respected and protected

54. Violence against humanitarian workers and assets continued to impede humanitarian activities in conflicts, often with devastating consequences for civilians. Preliminary records from the Aid Worker Security Database show that at least 249 aid workers were killed, kidnapped or seriously wounded. The overwhelming majority were national staff. More than three quarters of recorded incidents took place in five countries, with the highest number in South Sudan, followed by Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. Other sources reported much higher figures; for example, in South Sudan the United Nations recorded that 24 aid workers had been killed, while in Afghanistan it recorded that 15 aid workers had been killed, 26 injured and 121 abducted. In many cases, violence or threats led to the reduction or suspension of humanitarian operations, leaving vulnerable people without basic necessities for their survival.

55. In one egregious incident, an air strike hit a United Nations-Syrian Arab Red Crescent convoy and warehouse near Urum al-Kubra on 19 September. According to

the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, the attack killed at least 14 humanitarian workers, injured at least 15 others and destroyed 17 trucks and vital humanitarian supplies (see A/HRC/34/64, paras. 79-88).[8]

56. Enhancing the protection of humanitarian workers and assets necessitates action on several fronts, as outlined by the Security Council in its resolution 2175 (2014). In particular, parties to conflict must respect and protect humanitarian personnel and objects, including by taking all feasible precautions when planning or deciding upon an attack. Member States must ensure that there is accountability for acts of violence against humanitarian workers and assets in violation of applicable law.

Protection of civilians must be prioritized in United Nations peace operations

57. United Nations peace operations remain an indispensable tool for protecting civilians in complex crises. The deterioration of security in many peace operation contexts, such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, together with high-profile incidents in South Sudan, highlighted the enduring importance of peace operations and the challenges that they continue to face. These events reinforced the importance of ensuring that protection remains central to political strategies and a common focus for all United Nations actors, in addition to an important area of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations.

58. Peacekeepers must be given the capacity to fulfil their mandates, supported by robust political action at all levels. In this regard, I welcome the continuing efforts to improve training for peacekeepers and I encourage the Security Council and Member States to support these initiatives. We must be realistic, however, in terms of what peacekeepers can achieve in situations of extreme violence, in particular when government forces systematically target civilians. States bear the primary responsibility to protect civilians, and peacekeepers are not a substitute for political engagement to tackle sources of violence.

59. Peacekeepers must recognize their responsibility to act, to the full extent of their mandates and capabilities, to prevent and respond to threats against civilians and must be held accountable for underperformance or non-performance. In this regard, I will accord priority to the implementation of relevant recommendations stemming from, among others, the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations and the independent special investigation into the violence in Juba in 2016. I urge Member States to commit themselves to abiding by the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians, endorsed by 40 countries representing nearly half of all deployed peacekeepers, which articulate an effective guide for implementing mandates for the protection of civilians. I also call upon Member States to join me in a collective effort across the United Nations system to detect, control and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (see A/71/818 and Add.1).

Protection priority III
Prevent forced displacement and pursue durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

60. Forced displacement has reached record levels, with more than 65 million people displaced by conflict, violence and persecution worldwide. Active hostilities between warring parties, often involving air strikes and shelling in urban areas, are a

[8] The United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry suggested lower figures. See S/2016/1093.

primary cause of displacement. Concerted efforts are needed at the national, regional and global levels to prevent forced displacement and find durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons.

61. Around two thirds of those forcibly displaced around the world are internally displaced persons. Countries with high levels of conflict-induced internal displacement included Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Globally, more than 40 per cent of internally displaced persons are children. Many internally displaced persons have been displaced multiple times in their quest for safety. Notwithstanding their overwhelming numbers, internally displaced persons often receive inadequate attention from their Governments and global leaders; they are the silent majority of the forcibly displaced.

62. The total number of refugees has surpassed 21 million for the first time. Almost three quarters of refugees come from just five countries and territories, with the Syrian Arab Republic accounting for the highest number (5 million) followed by Afghanistan, the occupied Palestinian territory, South Sudan and Somalia. Turkey hosts the largest refugee population, followed by Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Uganda. The refugee population in Uganda doubled, mostly in the second half of 2016, as a result of the conflict in South Sudan. These host States have shouldered a disproportionate responsibility in responding to the refugee crisis, taking in millions of refugees from their war-torn neighbours despite the increased demands that this places on their own economies and societies. In doing so, they contribute to conflict management, regional stability and collective security. These States need significantly more international support to cope with the consequences of such massive displacement.

63. Active hostilities, especially in urban areas, are a primary cause of displacement. This is most evident in the Syrian conflict, which has produced some 11.5 million refugees and internally displaced persons. More than 2 million people were displaced within the Syrian Arab Republic in 2016 alone. Hostilities have also displaced many people in Yemen, which had over 2 million internally displaced persons at the end of the year. In Iraq, more than 620,000 people were internally displaced in 2016 alone, including in excess of 120,000 in the last two months of the year during the operation to recapture Mosul. Equally alarming was the new displacement of 660,000 people within Afghanistan, the highest number on record, which coincided with the escalation of hostilities.

64. In the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, on average 2,000 people were internally displaced from their homes every day, with the total number of internally displaced persons increasing from 1.6 million to 2.2 million. Some 178,000 people were internally displaced between October and December alone; almost 90 per cent were fleeing active hostilities. There was also significant new displacement in South Sudan, in particular from July when hostilities escalated in Juba and elsewhere. In total, more than 1.85 million people were internally displaced in South Sudan as at the end of the year, including 223,994 sheltered in United Nations sites for the protection of civilians. In addition, some 760,000 people fled the country, bringing the total number of South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries to more than 1.4 million, including 640,000 in Uganda.

65. Refugees and internally displaced persons were exposed to serious protection risks, including killings, sexual and gender-based violence, torture, forced recruitment, trafficking in persons, early and forced marriage and arbitrary arrest and detention. Children, especially unaccompanied or separated children, are particularly vulnerable. Several attacks on camps or sites for internally displaced persons were reported, including in Iraq, Myanmar, Nigeria, South Sudan and the

Syrian Arab Republic. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there was continued concern over the Government's efforts to close such sites at short notice, such as in March and April in Kitchanga, North Kivu, affecting 43,000 internally displaced persons. It is incumbent on States to maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of camps and settlements for refugees and internally displaced persons, so as to ensure that residents are not subject to forced recruitment and do not become military targets. Forced returns, including the forced return of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon, were also a serious concern.

66. Displacement has become protracted in many conflict-affected countries. This results from a combination of factors, including continuing hostilities and insecurity stemming from the lack of political resolution of conflicts and inadequate access to basic services, durable housing and livelihood opportunities. A forthcoming study commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, entitled "Breaking the impasse", highlights effective practices and provides recommendations to better respond to protracted internal displacement. In particular, it articulates the steps needed to achieve collective outcomes for internally displaced persons over several years, bringing together government, humanitarian and development partners.

67. Important efforts to address forced displacement were made. At the World Humanitarian Summit, it was emphasized that long-term displacement could be tackled through the new way of working, which promotes greater coherence between humanitarian and development actors to reduce vulnerabilities, build the resilience of displaced persons and host communities and promote durable solutions (see A/71/239, para. 31). In the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, Member States committed themselves to a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting refugees. This is a key element of the comprehensive refugee response framework and will feature in the future global compact on refugees. In the Declaration, Member States confirmed that, in line with the principle of non-refoulement, individuals must not be returned at borders. They also recognized the need for reflection on effective strategies to prevent and reduce internal displacement and ensure adequate protection and assistance for internally displaced persons. In the New Urban Agenda, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, it was stressed that towns and cities affected by displacement must receive support to meet the needs of internally displaced persons and host communities. These are welcome initiatives and I urge all stakeholders to implement their commitments without delay.

Path to protection
My vision for strengthening the protection of civilians in armed conflict

Prevent and end conflict

68. My overarching priority as Secretary-General is to mobilize all stakeholders to prevent the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of crisis, including but not limited to armed conflict. This is the most effective way to protect civilians in the long term. The human and financial costs of pursuing military solutions to conflicts are unacceptable. We need a surge in diplomacy for peace, in partnership with relevant actors, including through the use of my own good offices. Efforts should focus on dialogue and inclusive peace processes that address the parties' grievances and underlying causes of violence, leading to sustainable solutions. This alone will not be enough, however. In the long term, a holistic approach is required to address the root causes of conflict, promote human rights and the rule of law,

strengthen governance and institutions and invest in inclusive and sustainable development.

69. Another key step is to improve early-warning and early-action mechanisms and ensure that we have the capacity and political will to intervene before it is too late. This is the lesson of innumerable conflicts and the driving force behind the Human Rights Up Front initiative. We must also address illicit and irresponsible arms transfers, which enable conflict and undermine protection and peacebuilding efforts. We cannot achieve these objectives working alone or in silos. While the primary responsibility for conflict prevention lies with Member States and the Security Council, a culture of prevention must flow through all aspects of the United Nations work.

Enhance respect for international law and promote good practice by parties to conflict

70. Where we cannot prevent conflict, we must strive to prevent civilian death and suffering in conflict. A key priority is to enhance respect for international humanitarian law and international human rights law by encouraging good practice by parties to conflict. Much of the civilian death and suffering that we see in conflict could be avoided if the parties respected their obligations under international law and implemented policies and practical measures to avoid civilian harm in military operations. Enhancing parties' compliance with international law not only prevents and mitigates civilian harm, but also improves the prospects for resolving conflict and building sustainable peace. Systematic accountability for violations is also crucial to provide redress for victims, deter further violations and promote peace and reconciliation. Where parties to conflict persist in seriously violating human rights or international humanitarian law, the Security Council should take decisive action to ensure accountability.

71. During my tenure, I will facilitate a global effort to mobilize Member States, civil society and other stakeholders to enhance respect for international law and strengthen the protection of civilians in conflict. This will include awareness-raising and advocacy, developing and sharing good practices, and research and dialogue on the root causes of parties' behaviour. It will also encompass initiatives to improve data collection and analysis, together with public reporting on the human cost of conflict, which will facilitate evidence-based analysis of trends and patterns of civilian harm. In addition, I will encourage efforts by Member States and regional organizations to develop and implement policies to avoid civilian harm in military operations. These should include pre-conflict planning, guidance on the use of particular weapons and tactics, tracking and analysing the impact of operations on civilians and making amends for civilian harm. Non-State armed groups should also be encouraged to implement practical measures to avoid civilian harm. This will require continued engagement with such groups on humanitarian issues relating to the protection of civilians.

Protect the humanitarian and medical mission and prioritize the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations

72. Impartial medical care and principled humanitarian action save lives and reduce suffering for millions of people in conflict. As famine threatens the lives and dignity of more than 20 million people in conflict-affected countries, and millions of others struggle to gain access to the goods and services that they need to survive, ensuring rapid, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access must be a priority. I call upon all parties to conflict, in addition to the Security Council, Member States and other relevant actors, to do everything within their power to facilitate humanitarian access and create an enabling environment for humanitarian action. I

further call for specific action to protect medical care in conflict, including by implementing the recommendations submitted to the Council pursuant to resolution 2286 (2016). The norms that protect medical care in conflict are among the first and most fundamental expressions of the spirit driving the protection of civilians agenda, and they demand the highest respect.

73. United Nations peace operations are an indispensable tool to prevent conflict, protect civilians, achieve political solutions and contribute to lasting peace. They must have the political backing and material support that they need to perform these tasks, together with investment in training and capacity-building. Their effectiveness relies largely on a clearly articulated political purpose, which only the Security Council can provide. This must be informed by effective United Nations assessments, including through mechanisms such as the informal expert group on the protection of civilians. Peacekeepers must always fulfil their core obligation to protect when civilian lives are at stake, but protecting civilians requires far more than physical protection by peacekeepers. It is a whole-of-mission endeavour encompassing civilian, military and police functions such as engaging with local communities, mediating disputes, monitoring human rights violations and gathering information to prevent future violence. This must be complemented by robust political engagement at the international level, including by the Council.

Prevent forced displacement and pursue durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

74. There cannot be sustainable peace, protection or development worldwide when more than 65 million people are displaced by conflict, violence and persecution. We must move beyond perpetually struggling with the consequences of such massive displacement and began to seriously tackle its root causes. This means preventing and resolving conflict, strengthening respect for international law and developing operational policies and practices to protect civilians from hostilities. Fewer civilians would flee if parties to conflict spared them from the effects of hostilities, notably by complying with the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. In addition, under international humanitarian law, parties are prohibited from forcibly displacing civilians unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand. We must also ensure that those who flee their homes receive the protection and assistance that they need. In particular, all States must uphold the right of those fleeing persecution and conflict to seek asylum and must ensure that refugees are protected from refoulement. The Security Council should emphasize these obligations and promote accountability for violations.

75. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants represents important progress towards a more equitable sharing of the burden and responsibility for hosting and supporting refugees. I will support Member States to implement their commitments in the coming years, including through the adoption of a global compact on refugees. In parallel, we must redouble our efforts to address the plight of the more than 40 million conflict-induced internally displaced persons. Throughout my tenure, I will work with affected Governments and other stakeholders to reduce internal displacement by 50 per cent by 2030 in a manner that respects the sovereignty of Member States, protects the human rights and dignity of internally displaced persons, promotes durable solutions and allows internally displaced persons and host communities to contribute to sustainable development. The twentieth anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, in 2018, offers a unique opportunity for stakeholders to come together and commit themselves to taking specific action.

Unified effort throughout the United Nations system

76. I am determined to ensure a unified effort to prevent crisis and protect civilians in conflict throughout all aspects of United Nations work. This is the very essence of the Human Rights Up Front initiative. Our collective efforts to reform the United Nations peace and security, development and management systems will help to better manage the peace continuum, from prevention and conflict resolution to peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term development. The protection of civilians must remain a priority throughout this process. This will require concerted efforts by my special representatives, special envoys, humanitarian and development coordinators and other senior officials. Coordination between peace operations and other United Nations components at the headquarters and field levels, while respecting distinct roles and boundaries, is crucial. We must also strengthen our partnerships with regional organizations. The full participation of women and girls is essential at all stages. We must all work together to help the Security Council and Member States to prevent conflict, protect civilians in conflict and build inclusive, resilient and equitable societies. Ultimately, protection is a responsibility spanning the entire United Nations.

Recommendations

77. Building on the recommendations in previous reports on the protection civilians in armed conflict and in the Agenda for Humanity, I emphasize the importance of the following measures.

Protection priority 1
Enhance respect for international law and promote good practice by parties to conflict

78. I call upon Member States and parties to conflict to develop, implement and share operational policies and practical measures to enhance respect for international humanitarian and human rights law and avoid harm to civilians, with particular attention to the conduct of hostilities in urban areas.

79. I call upon parties to conflict:

(a) To stop the military use of critical civilian infrastructure such as hospitals, schools and places of worship;

(b) To avoid locating military objectives within or near densely populated areas;

(c) To avoid the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas.

80. I call upon Member States:

(a) To join a global effort to promote greater compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law to enhance the protection of civilians;

(b) To ratify or accede to core international instruments aimed at protecting civilians, including the Arms Trade Treaty and similar regional instruments, and ensure that national legislation and policies implement international obligations;

(c) To exert their influence, in particular when participating in military partnerships, to ensure that parties to conflict comply with international law;

(d) To endorse the Safe Schools Declaration;

(e) To engage constructively in efforts to develop a political declaration to address the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas;

(f) To support the systematic collection and analysis of information on the protection of civilians, including data disaggregated by sex and age and gender analysis, and ensure that it feeds into conflict analysis, prevention and response;

(g) To adopt the legislative, policy and law enforcement measures necessary to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of serious violations;

(h) To ratify or accede to the Rome Statute and provide adequate political, technical and financial support to the International Criminal Court.

81. The Security Council should:

(a) Use all tools at its disposal to strengthen the protection of civilians and enhance compliance with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law;

(b) Ensure accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, including by, as appropriate, applying targeted measures, supporting national prosecutions and hybrid mechanisms, mandating commissions of inquiry, fact-finding missions and investigation commissions, referring situations to the International Criminal Court and providing consistent support to the Court to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

Protection priority II
Protect the humanitarian and medical mission and accord priority to the protection of civilians in United Nations peace operations

Humanitarian and medical mission

82. I call upon Member States and parties to conflict:

(a) To adopt and implement measures, such as those defined in the recommendations submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), to protect the wounded and sick and medical personnel, facilities and equipment, and share best practices and lessons learned;

(b) To adopt clear, simple and expedited procedures to facilitate rapid and unimpeded humanitarian access.

83. The Security Council should:

(a) Condemn any instances of arbitrary withholding of consent to impartial humanitarian relief operations or depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supply and access, and emphasize that such acts constitute violations of international humanitarian law;

(b) Call upon parties to conflict to comply with their obligation to respect and protect humanitarian and medical personnel and objects, condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks against such personnel and objects and call for effective investigations into and accountability for such incidents.

United Nations peace operations

84. I call upon Member States:

(a) To endorse the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and ensure that military and police personnel provided to peacekeeping operations are fully equipped and trained to effectively implement mandates for the protection of civilians, including mandates to prevent sexual violence in conflict;

(b) To support my initiatives to promote effective and accountable performance throughout the United Nations system, including in the implementation of mandates for the protection of civilians.

85. The Security Council should ensure that the protection of civilians is a core aspect of political strategies for preventing and resolving conflict and that political solutions drive protection mandates in peace operations, including through prioritized and sequenced mandates.

Protection priority III
Prevent forced displacement and pursue durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons

86. I call upon Member States:

(a) To intensify efforts to tackle the root causes of forced displacement by preventing and resolving conflicts and strengthening respect for international law, including in protracted conflict;

(b) To uphold the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement under international law;

(c) To develop and implement effective strategies, with the support of humanitarian and development agencies as relevant, to ensure the comprehensive protection of refugees and internally displaced persons, promote their self-reliance and resilience, including through education programmes and livelihood opportunities, and work towards durable solutions.

87. The Security Council should:

(a) Condemn unlawful acts of forced displacement by parties to conflict, call for the immediate cessation of such acts and apply targeted measures against the leadership of the parties responsible;

(b) Remind parties to conflict of their obligation to maintain the civilian and humanitarian character of camps and settlements for refugees and internally displaced persons, condemn direct and indiscriminate attacks on such sites and call for effective investigations into and accountability for such incidents.